



April 25, 2014

I hope everyone had a good week. I would like to start Open Line by sharing an experience I had last week at my local neighborhood nail salon. While I was there, three ladies walked in to have their nails done. I recognized one of the ladies who receives services through DIDD and paid close attention to interactions from that moment on. I watched the ladies quietly to observe relationships with their direct support staff and reactions to getting their nails done. It was apparent this was not a new experience for them and they were quite pleased to be there. They knew what to do and communications between staff and the ladies were absolutely awesome! The kind, gentle and supportive manner in which the staff interacted with these ladies was wonderful to see. Further, this staff had no idea anyone was watching her every move so closely. She encouraged independence, offered assistance only when needed and promoted a relationship between the ladies and salon staff. This is a true example of community participation and integration at its best.

This simply appeared to be three ladies on a typical outing together. In the end, I found out the staff person was Ms. Geraldine Stanford and the ladies are supported by New Horizons. Ms. Stanford was the epitome of a great direct support professional and I am so personally grateful to her and the thousands of others across the state who work tirelessly to support people we serve. It is easy to get disheartened when you only read about negative experiences in the news, especially when the reality is there are countless wonderful interactions and unfailing support from so many great direct support professionals in our system. Hats off to you Ms. Stanford! You are the best and I thank you and New Horizons for making the lives of people we support so positive. A heartfelt thanks to all those other unsung heroes out there who do the same each and every day for the people we serve!

- **2014 Legislative Wrap-Up:** The 108th General Assembly adjourned April 17. Following its adjournment, many positive changes are underway for DIDD. The department's Sunset Bill passed both the House and Senate, extending DIDD until June 30, 2018. Along with other organizations, DIDD will be part of a taskforce to study and make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding ways to improve access to programs and services for early screening, diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Tennessee. In addition, the DIDD Fiscal Year 2014-2015 final budget was successfully approved with key adjustments to DIDD administered programs. Final budget highlights are covered in the April 11 edition of *Open Line*. Overall, an extensive amount of teamwork and dedication was devoted to advocating for persons supported during the 2014 legislative session. On behalf of DIDD, we sincerely appreciate the efforts of all those involved.
- **DIDD Web Developer:** The department would like to welcome John McLearran to the team. John will be responsible for oversight of DIDD's Internet and Intranet page. He joins us from the Department of Commerce and Insurance (DCI), where he maintained and successfully reorganized all of DCI's 52 plus external web properties. He is part of the state's Web Steering Committee and a subject matter expert for the state's Content Management System (CMS) initiative. We have some exciting things planned for the DIDD website in the next year and are thrilled to have John on board!

- **DIDD Investigation Reports:** The Protection from Harm (PFH) unit would like to notify all community providers of a change relating to the “Summary of Investigation” section of DIDD investigation reports. Effective April 21, the footer designating the document as confidential, has been removed. We did this in response to requests from providers who wish to use the summary in unemployment hearings. The person supported will not be identified in the summary. However, the perpetrator’s name will be included. There may be occasional references to other staff in summaries (e.g., if a person has committed Reportable Staff Misconduct (RSM); however, only initials will be used). These changes apply only to the “Summary of Investigation” and not the investigation report itself.
- **Free Training on Customized Employment (CE) and *Discovery*:** Those interested in enhancing their employment efforts are encouraged to join Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Subject Matter Experts Michael Callahan and Abby Cooper for a series of in-person trainings on May 20-21, June 25-26 and July 21-22. Specifically, May sessions will cover an overview of CE, the steps involved in CE, understanding and implementing *Discovery*, Group *Discovery*, Customized Job Development and your role in the CE and *Discovery* process. Additionally, small homework assignments will be given in all sessions. The June training will include the history of CE and go into detail about the steps included in *Discovery*. Additional topics covered on June 26 will be completing profiles, creating visual resumes and components of the CE meeting. For July’s session, topics will cover needs analysis, using visual resumes, job negotiations, sales aspect of job development, the art of asking and preparations before speaking with employers.

Please note the sessions build upon each other and a strong commitment is needed to attend all three sessions. Additionally, meetings will be held at Clover Bottom Developmental Center in the One Cannon Way basement (275 Stewarts Ferry Pike, Nashville).

For meeting agendas and to RSVP for **all three sessions**, please contact Betty Chester at Betty.Chester@tn.gov by May 16, 2014.

- **Easter at Greene Valley:** Larry Troutman received a standing ovation after singing his a cappella rendition of “How Great Thou Art” at Liberty Freewill Baptist Church in Chuckey during their Easter morning service. Larry and his friend Billy Wilmoth were invited to the service by a church member who happens to be one of their support staff. Larry has a beautiful singing voice and a wide repertoire of gospel songs that he has sung for years. When asked if he would like to sing for the congregation, Larry gladly accepted the invitation. Thank you Larry for sharing your talent with Liberty Freewill Baptist Church.



- **Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) Training:** A reminder DIDD, TN Career Centers, Workforce Essentials, Inc. and South Central Workforce Alliance, are bringing Subject Matter Experts from the Social Security Administration’s PASS cadre to provide training on PASS Plans and Work Incentives for persons with disabilities who receive Social Security (SSI/ SSDI) or concurrent benefits. The training will be held May 7 from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. at the Northfield Workforce Development and Conference Center (5700 Main St, Spring Hill, 37174). Space is limited to 50 and participants are requested to bring their own lunch. To register, click [here](#). Please contact Suzy Pruitt, Disability Resource Coordinator, at 615-337-8169 for more information.

- **Focus Groups:** The Knoxville Focus Group (KFG) members would like to thank RHA for hosting and providing food at their meeting this past Tuesday. Mr. Stanley Young, East Tennessee Regional Office (ETRO) Person Centered Practices unit, presented on Person Centered Practices (PCP) and provided handouts with contact information. The group asked a lot of great questions! If you are interested in hosting the next KFG meeting, please contact Dr. Mailahn, East TN Customer Focused Services Coordinator, at 865-320-2196.



- **Family Support Program (FSP) Appreciation:** In a recent letter, the Best family shared their experiences and what this program means for son David, 11, and their entire family. David was born with lobar holoprosencephaly, a brain condition that severely limits his abilities. The Best's explained David is extremely happy most of the time, but has limited motion and communication skills. Therefore, they rely on various types of special needs equipment to enable a fun and productive daily routine. FSP funds have also been used for bathroom modifications (pictured pre and post renovation). Below, are excerpts from their letter:



The Family Support Program has been essential in our ability to purchase special needs equipment that has enhanced David's life over the last few years. These monies have purchased a float, so he could go to the local YMCA to swim and interact with other children from our community. It has also allowed many different therapy products to be purchased such as a therapy swing that he loves to be in, not to mention the help this is for mom. Regardless of whether you have grown out of or broken a wheelchair, insurance companies will only replace or repair a limited number of times. Family Support assistance has helped to replace or refit his wheelchair, keeping him in proper alignment and comfortable.



The assistance we have received over the years has allowed us to do so much for our son. We cannot even begin to express our gratitude. We are thankful this program is made available to families across our state. Not only has our family benefited, but as David has outgrown equipment, we have passed it on to other families that could use it. It would be devastating to so many if this program ended. This program touches the lives of so many, who in turn, bless us with their smiles of gratitude.

Special thanks to the Best's for permission to publish their story and Linda Tilson of The Arc Washington County for sharing it with DIDD.

- **Fair Housing Update:** The Tennessee Fair Housing Council will be conducting a free workshop on the housing rights of people with disabilities in Nashville on May 22 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Please see attached flyer for registration information and further details.
- **Free Webinar:** On May 13, Isaac Baldry, Theresa Baldry and Ellen Condon will facilitate a session on *Self-Management Strategies for People to Live and Work Independently* from 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m. MST. During the webinar, presenters will address planning to incorporate assistive technology and other self-management tools and strategies into daily life as well as high, low and no-tech solutions and keeping current on assistive technology changes. Time will be allotted at the end for audience members to ask questions. Please note space is limited. To reserve a seat, click [here](#). Upon registration, participants will receive a confirmation e-mail containing instructions for joining the webinar.
- **Employment First Community of Practice Webinars:** Please join Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) Thomas Macy and Nancy Gurney on May 12 for a session on organizational assessment, diversifying funding streams and collecting data to measure progress from 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m. CST. To RSVP, please contact Betty Chester at Betty.Chester@tn.gov by May 5 at 4:00 p.m. CST.

In addition, Doug Crandell (SME) will lead a webinar on promoting evidence-based practices in Supported Employment, leveraging social capital and expanding the use of Customized Employment strategies on June 2 from 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m. CST. To RSVP, contact Betty by May 26 at 4:00 p.m. CST. Registration for both webinars is limited to 25 participants and on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Be safe and have a great weekend!

~Debbie